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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKEY: BACKGROUND ON CHP CHAIRMAN DENIZ BAYKAL

REF: A. 95 ANKARA 12868  
[B](#). 95 ANKARA 10386  
[C](#). ANKARA 8079  
[D](#). ANKARA 7726

(U) Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch. Reasons: 1.5(b)(d)

[1](#). (C) Summary: Combining a sharp intellect with a divisive manner, Deniz Baykal is back in Parliament as opposition leader of a CHP reeling from the thrashing it received at the hands of Islam-influenced AK Party in Nov. 3 national elections. Aware of widespread public perceptions that he is a "factionalist", Baykal has tried to assure the public that he will lead a responsible opposition. His de facto role as parliamentary representative of the Establishment, however, will encourage him to sharpen differences between CHP and the AK government. End summary.

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General Bio Data  
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[2](#). (U) Baykal was born in 1938 to a middle class family in Antalya, now a booming tourist resort on the Mediterranean coast. He is a graduate of Ankara University, earning both a law degree and a doctorate in political science in 1963. Baykal was a Fulbrighter in 1965, studying for two years at Columbia U. and U.C. Berkeley. He claims he was active in the free speech movement there. Baykal is married, with a son and daughter, both of whom are physicians. He speaks good English.

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Baykal's Character  
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[3](#). (C) Baykal is known as a man of sharp intellect with a photographic memory. He is reportedly able to listen at length without interrupting (rare for a Turkish politician), and then to summarize his interlocutor's points concisely and accurately. In American terms he is a policy wonk, quickly mastering details and concepts of both domestic and foreign policy. At the same time he is not a warm man in front of crowds and has an aggressive, biting debating style. Fiercely competitive and ambitious, he is able to win intense loyalty from his closest followers, but is seen in general as overly shrewd and as an opportunist. His image is colored most by his history of disruptive political tactics over minor issues both within CHP (the Republican People's Party, founded by Ataturk and considered the Party of the State par excellence) and on the political scene in general. In short, he is considered the current political scene's most polarizing figure.

[4](#). (C) Baykal's personal character is reflected by the course of a long career in politics, which formally began with the CHP in the 1960s and included several months' incarceration (along with then CHP leader Bulent Ecevit and other senior politicians across the spectrum) after the 1980 military coup. His taste for political infighting and factionalism engendered a profound antagonism among his many former-allies-turned-rivals -- including Ecevit, with whom he formally and bitterly parted ways in the 1980s.

[5](#). (C) In the 1987 elections, Baykal was elected to Parliament under the banner of the Social Democrat Peoples' Party (SHP), becoming the SHP Secretary-General shortly thereafter. He used the post in an attempt to topple SHP leader Erdal Inonu by launching a purge of Inonu supporters from key party positions. Having failed ultimately to oust Inonu, Baykal left SHP for the newly-revived CHP (closed after the 1980 coup), becoming its chairman in 1992. In

1995, as junior partner and briefly FonMin in a coalition under P.M. Tansu Ciller's DYP (True Path Party), Baykal promoted a government crisis that brought down the Government, paving the way for early elections that eventually brought Turkey's first Islamist-led government to power in 1996. Baykal, who was lending essential support from outside to Mesut Yilmaz's 1997-98 ANAP-led coalition, also provoked that government's collapse over a minor issue. Disgusted with Baykal's wrecker tactics, voters booted him and CHP out of Parliament in the 1999 elections.

16. (C) Following the 1999 election debacle, Baykal resigned his chairmanship, but planted his loyalists in enough places that he was able to engineer a comeback a year later. However, memories of Baykal's character traits have lingered, especially among his natural left-of-center constituents. These memories were partly responsible for CHP's inability to unite the left-of-center vote and thus for CHP's trouncing by AK Party in the Nov. 3 elections (refs C, D), even in traditional CHP strongholds in the West of Turkey. Although CHP now joins AK as one of only two parties in the Parliament, CHP activists and officials are deeply disappointed by their distant second-place finish. Much of the blame has been placed on Baykal; CHP and Baykal also suffered from their reputation as elitists sharply out of touch with the average Turkish voter.

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Meeting with Baykal  
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17. (C) In meetings with USG officials, Baykal will try to leave the impression that he has changed into a conciliatory statesman. He will be alert for any intimation he can take to his party, the Establishment, and the voters that the USG is uncomfortable with AK or wants to see AK leader Erdogan, who is formally banned from politics and thus unable to serve as Prime Minister, kept on the political sidelines. Our willingness to work with the new government is clear and we must be careful to avoid giving Baykal any cause to misrepresent our stance.

18. (C) On foreign policy issues, Baykal supports pressing for an accession negotiation date from the EU. He has not been helpful to our efforts to press the GOT and Turkish Cypriots toward a settlement. On Iraq Baykal has been careful not to commit himself either way despite the general anti-war (and reflexive anti-American) sentiment in his party. However, in an end-September public statement he hinted that, under certain circumstances, he might be prepared to accept a regime-change solution in Iraq when he acknowledged that "we have to be prepared for situations that may occur outside our will or expectations."

19. (C) Baykal is trying to promote the image of CHP as a reformist party. He may well wish to highlight his party's call for lifting of parliamentary immunity and contrast this stance with that of AK, which is trying to sidestep the issue. Several AK ministers, associates of Erdogan from his days as Istanbul Mayor, are like their leader facing allegations of corruption, which AK regards as a political effort by the Deep State to hold a tight rein on the party and the government. However, Baykal has also reiterated his conditional support for some changes to the Turkish constitution that could help pave the way for Erdogan's return to elective politics.

PEARSON